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This conference paper identifies two factors in contemporary educational programs which may have a detrimental effect on disadvantaged youth. First, it is felt that from a historical as well as a contemporary perspective, it is clear that the public schools are designed to meet the needs of the middle class. Thus, even if the same educational program is offered to all students regardless of class, educational inequalities might persist. This middle-class bias also results in rejection of disadvantaged children by personnel who perceive themselves as members of this class. Secondly, school activities and attitudes are more suitable for girls than boys. This disregard for inter-sex difference among students operates to the disadvantage of boys from the lower socioeconomic class, especially since they in particular lack contact with any consistent and desirable male models or male behavioral patterns. The disadvantaged child must be considered an "exceptional" child who requires the services of a highly trained teacher to carry out a specifically relevant educational program. Reactions to this conference paper are included. (DK)

EDUCATION AND THE DISADVANTAGED

Proceedings of A Conference on the Disadvantaged

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

June 8 and 9, 1967

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THE INEQUITY
OF THE SYSTEM!

Although Mr. Goldman was not a speaker at the Conference, he spent a considerable amount of time talking to participants about the problems currently facing the schools. To this end, he observed some of the discussion groups, and met with participants individually and in small groups.

These discussions led him to develop two conclusions about the views expressed by the participants. The first is that there was a general tendency for those involved to digress from the topic at hand and to consistently turn to consideration of person-to-person interaction. The second was the tendency to place major emphasis on changing the "things" of education---the books, the buildings, the teaching machines, and the amount of supplies available. In both cases the discussions tended toward the superficial rather than an in-depth approach.

In the paper that follows, included because it was a direct outgrowth of his experiences during the Conference, Mr. Goldman examines two factors which are implicit in our contemporary educational programs and points out the ways in which these have a detrimental effect on disadvantaged youth.

First, evidence is presented which describes the extent to which the schools are middle class oriented and the ways in which this orientation results in discriminatory behavior on the part of school personnel.

The second factor is the extent to which the nature of school activities is better suited to girls than to boys and the manner in which this operates to the disadvantage of youth (and particularly boys) from the lower socio-economic class.

The paper clearly points out that a need exists for a complete analysis of instructional and operational procedures to determine those modifications

that will lead to the development of schools which would be effective instructional centers for the education of children.

THE SCHOOLS AND THE DISADVANTAGED

An Examination of a Fundamental Conflict

Harvey Goldman*

It has in recent years become rather commonplace for those concerned with the future of our nation to expound upon "the central role of the public schools within our society." Such presentations tend to place major emphasis on the rapidity of change within our society and the significance of that change for the educational establishment with respect to insuring that our populace is capable of adapting to evolving conditions within our social, economic, and philosophic spheres.

It has also been evident that a sizable minority of Americans (forty to fifty million) have not had the quality of their lives significantly enhanced during this same period in which the standard of living for the majority has been characterized by numerous qualitative improvements. In fact, the quality of the lives of those living in our urban centers has regressed in relative terms. Bagdikian[1], one commentator on our contemporary social scene, has expressed the fear that a class of permanently poor people is being created and that those encased in this "cycle of poverty" will continue to find escape impossible without a massive infusion of resources---human and monetary---from both the public and private sectors of our economy.

In particular, concern has been expressed over the inability of our schools to deal effectively with the problems in our urban centers. Conant[2] has pointed out that youth in our urban centers, and particularly Negroes,

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find it increasingly difficult to obtain employment. This is as true for those possessing high school diplomas as it is for those who leave school prior to graduation.

Melby[3] has pointed out the extent to which elementary students become increasingly dissatisfied with the schools as they progress through the grades; their self-concepts tend to be diminished rather than enhanced as a result of their experiences in classrooms.

This paper constitutes an examination of two factors, both integrally related, which contribute to this disaffection that our disadvantaged youth express toward the schools at such an early age. The first factor to be examined will be the middle-class nature of our school systems as they currently exist within and outside of our urban centers. The second factor to be considered will be the blatant manner with which educators tend to disregard the differential nature of the two sexes.

The Middle-Class Nature of the Public Schools

The first public schools in our country were the colonial grammar schools. These institutions served both college preparatory and religious functions. Thus, the existence of a well-trained and adequate clergy was assured at all times. A major function of the colonial grammar school "was to establish a common base of religious leadership in the whole population..."[4] Although designed in a manner which insured that only a select few would pass through its hallowed halls, the grammar school served a broader purpose than at first appeared evident. That is, those who received their education in the grammar schools were expected to transmit their knowledge to the townspeople and, in this way, facilitate the development of a common culture (albeit a religious one).

The academy, the development of which followed that of the grammar

school, was an institution designed to serve a broader base of clientele and also to meet a very different set of needs. As envisioned by Benjamin Franklin, the academy was to be an instrument for the preparation of the rising middle class in terms of civic and occupational skills. It is obvious that the academy was originally established to meet the needs of those comprising the middle class at a time when the types of skills required by our society were in a state of rapid transition. The need for skilled personnel had become acute. That this ideal (the provision of occupational skills for all aspiring to middle-class status) was not fully carried out was the result of a compromise deemed necessary at the time.

It is particularly interesting to note that no classical languages were offered in the first publicly supported high school opened in Boston in 1821. Yet such subjects as surveying and navigation were included in the curriculum along with literature and composition, mathematics, history, science, and philosophy. Again, the implication is clear that the publicly supported high schools were to serve a practical function; that those completing the program offered were to be capable of "carrying their own weight" within the society.

Speaking of the public schools as they exist today, Krug[5] has pointed out that contemporary American education is based on and committed to three major ideals: 1) that it should be free; 2) that it should be popular (meeting the needs of the people); 3) that it should be universal.

One cannot escape the realization that the schools in our country have historically been the agents for the promotion of a common culture---one which encompassed the vast majority of the populace. Even the colonial grammar schools, selective in nature and educating only the intellectually capable, served the ultimate purpose of providing the community with a common

culture. In retrospect, an examination of the early academy and the public high schools brings to light substantial evidence of the middle-class nature of these schools. The inclusion of vocational and other "practical" courses in their curricula is quite noticeable. During the period when public high schools were increasing in number, the traditional classical curriculum offered by many private schools was increasingly viewed with disdain by the general public.

The question arises as to whether or not the public schools as we now know them continue to retain their middle-class bias---a bias which insures that those not committed to a middle-class value pattern are excluded from equal educational opportunities in a systematic manner through a subtle, but ever-present, form of discrimination. The major question to be answered at this time is whether or not such discrimination does exist even though, in many cases, the same curriculum, texts, buildings, and percentage of certified teachers are available to all students throughout a school system irregardless of social class membership.

A study conducted by Sims[6] clearly indicates that teachers consistently perceive themselves as members of the middle or upper-middle class. In addition, they exhibited extremely conservative views with respect to political and economic issues.

> The majority of the teachers showed little sympathy with labor and laboring people, generally considered themselves a "cut above" skilled workers and, to a lesser extent, above other "white collar" workers.[7]

The attitudes of teachers, as described by Sims, indicate a desire on the part of those teachers to maintain the status quo. At a time when the liberal segment of our society is espousing the need for the federal government to make available massive sums of money for programs to assist the disadvantaged in breaking their "cycle of poverty," teachers are expressing

their desire for a traditional approach to the economic, political, and social problems which confront our nation. The type of social, economic, and political order which they see as desirable is disconcertingly similar to those of the highly conservative, status quo oriented, influential businessmen and bankers described by Kimbrough.[8]

Another study[9] clearly points out the extent to which the middle-class oriented teachers manifest their internalized prejudices in terms of discriminatory behavior which prevents disadvantaged children from taking full advantage of the educational opportunities offered them. The evidence clearly implied that teachers' behavioral patterns indicated a rejection of lower-class students on their part. The data indicated that students from the lower socio-economic class generally received lower grades than did those who were members of the middle or upper classes. It was also quite interesting to note that students from the lower socio-economic class received more severe punishments than did students from the other socio-economic classes for the same disciplinary offenses. Finally, the data made evident the fact that those students whom we currently term "disadvantaged" were not accepted socially by their teachers.

Teachers[10] tend to manifest an obvious inconsistency when attempting to justify their rejection of disadvantaged students. Their justifications defy logic and can only be viewed as gross rationalizations in defense of their inability to effectively deal with the problems facing them. This investigation showed that teachers consistently perceive students from the lower socio-economic class as being "morally unacceptable" because they smoke, drink, swear, or are occasionally involved in sexually immoral acts. Behavior of this type was considered by the teachers to be both undesirable and unneccessary. On the other hand, the same behaviors, when manifested by

students from the middle or upper socio-economic classes, were casually excused by the teachers who explained these students' indiscretions with such terms as "it wasn't their fault," or "they've been terribly spoiled," or "it won't happen again." Clearly, a double standard is in effect and it is the disadvantaged students who consistently receive "the short end of the deal." The same teachers, when asked their opinions about their role as professional educators, stated that the same subject matter and teaching techniques are appropriate for all children. Once a teacher is able to adopt (and, perhaps, even believe) this position, he or she is nearly automatically relieved of all responsibility for the failure of some children to achieve in school. The next "logical" step is the statement that it is not the teacher's fault if the student did not learn what was "taught." At the same time we can be quite certain that these teachers would reject any statement which implied that, if teaching consisted merely of presenting a predetermined body of subject matter to students in a relatively routinized fashion, we would be better off eliminating all teachers and employing various forms of programmed instruction on a massive scale. Such a suggestion would immediately evoke from the teachers numerous platitudes describing the many unique characteristics of each individual and the fact that only a thinking human being---in this case, a teacher---is suited to deal with them since the number and the complexity of the relationships among those characteristics could not be effectively dealt with by a machine. Again, the inconsistency of their statements is evident; they imply that the teaching act and the nature of the content dealt with are relatively routine, yet rebel when confronted with a statement which asserts that routinized acts are best dealt with by machines built expressly for that purpose.

Although we would like to think of our schools as places in which the

finest possible education is provided to every student in attendance, it appears quite clear that this ideal state has not yet been attained. The evidence also seems to indicate that, to a considerable extent, a determination of the socio-economic class to which a student belongs can serve as a rough guide indicative of the quality of education accessible to that student and that the most desirable teaching-learning situations are most often available to students from the middle and upper socio-economic classes while being systematically withheld from those students classified as "lower-class."

The Differential Nature of the Sexes and the School Program

It is amazing to note the almost total disregard with which we, as educators, tend to dismiss the significance of inter-sex differences among our students. Not only is this disregard evident in the manner by which we develop curriculum, but it is also quite obvious when one examines the tests---both standardized and teacher-made---which are utilized in the schools. Few, if any, so-called "ability tests" used commonly in the schools (other than individual tests like the WISC or WAIS) provide norms for both males and females. Only a very few reading tests (like the Gray Oral Reading Test) provide differential norms for the sexes. And, aside from the Differential Aptitude Tests, almost none of the standardized achievement tests make such norms available.

In terms of school curricula there is very little differentiation of activities between the sexes. This is particularly true in the first through at least the third grade and, quite often, through the sixth grade. Boys and girls read together, write together, have art and music lessons together, and even have the dubious pleasure of sharing the same gym classes. The one area in which the schools have finally admitted that differences between boys and girls are of importance is with regard to reading interests. Many of the newer

reading texts designed for elementary schools contain stories geared to the interests of young boys. It should be noted, however, that this differential is in terms of materials and has no effect upon the nature of the activities with which the students are faced. The fact that most elementary teachers are female very probably has had a significant impact on the nature of the teaching-learning activities which have historically become an integral aspect of the elementary curriculum, but this will not be considered at this time since female teachers could, if they so desired and if they felt it was necessary, devise and utilize differential activities for boys and girls during at least a part of each school day.

Two factors must be considered at this time. The first is the extent to which differences exist between boys and girls which would necessitate the development of differential activities. And the second is an examination of the extent to which any differences that do exist between the social classes tend to result in a diminishing of the quality of education provided disadvantaged students.

Young girls from both the middle and lower socio-economic classes have many things in common.

Parents, particularly mothers, tend to keep young girls dressed in clothes which can be considered "pretty" or "cute". They are often admonished to "keep clean," "stay neat," and to "act like a young lady." This is not to infer that the clothes worn by young girls from the two social classes are necessarily of the same quality or that they are available in the same quantity; it is only to say that there is a type of clothes which young girls often wear and a set of adult expectations regarding the behavioral patterns of the young girls when wearing those clothes.

In both cases there are some distinct similarities regarding the type

of play activities in which the girls engage. They tend to play games which require role-playing, often acting out such roles as "mother," "nurse," "teacher," and "actress" (all of which are realistic roles which depict people whom they will meet throughout their lives). In addition to the fact that these activities require a relatively sophisticated approach to role-playing, they are also of a rather passive nature, usually requiring a minimal amount of physical exertion. They are also activities which the girls find it possible to carry out within spatial areas of limited size. A third common characteristic of these activities is that they involve a high degree of verbalization. The girls talk to their dolls or to the other girls playing with them. The girl playing the role of mother, nurse or teacher must explain to the other participants what is expected of them. Nevertheless, there very definitely appears to be a qualitative differential in the language patterns manifested by girls from the two social classes. To a great extent this differential can be accounted for by the differences in the quality of language utilized by the parents, and particularly the mothers, who serve as models for the girls.

Within their families, even as youngsters, the girls often enjoy certain advantages over their male counterparts. First of all, there is a tendency for the mother, who spends the most time with the youngsters during the day, to favor the girls; this tendency is exaggerated by the fact that the high degree of contact permits the girls to study and internalize the female role which their mothers carry out during the day---a role which involves the establishment of behavioral norms in a variety of areas (dress, cooking, cleaning, relations to others, etc.).

For the most part, the female model presented through the mass media describes women involved in activities similar to or related to those which

which the young girls view as common to the female role. They are also roles which the girls know will be open to them in later years. They are seen cleaning house, cooking, and caring for children. Even in those cases where women undertake an occupational role in the movies or on television, they usually retain their lady-like manner.

Now let us examine the situation in which young boys from the middle and lower socio-economic classes spend their childhood years.

The young boys from both social classes, too, tend to be dressed similarly very often. The neat, pressed slacks and clean white shirts are usually reserved for "dress-up" occasions. And for "every-day" wear the young boys can be found wearing T-shirts, sweat-shirts, dungarees, sneakers, and other articles of clothing of a similar nature. Rather than being admonished to "keep clean," "stay neat," and to "act like a young lady," the boys are told to "go out and play," "stay out of trouble," and to "act like a young man." Again, the inference cannot be made that the boys from the two social classes possess the same quantity or quality of clothes, only that there is a common type of clothes in which young boys tend to spend a considerable amount of time. As was also true for the girls, the type of clothing worn and the nature of the admonishments directed to them by their parents tend to convey to the boys a set of parental expectations which give direction to the type of behavioral patterns which they manifest.

The play activities of boys tend to be action-centered rather than role-playing centered. They tend to become involved in games of baseball, football, handball, stick-ball, running, swimming, volleyball, and others of a like sort. All of these are action-centered and also involve whole-body muscle activity; they involve the use of large muscles for body control. Those role-playing activities in which the boys do engage (such as cowboys,

soldiers, and firemen) do not describe models which are realistic with respect to our society, are not sufficiently common for the boys to observe and internalize the behavior common to them, and are usually not open to the boys in later years. Those activities in which the boys from both classes prefer to engage generally require large amounts of space and can not usually be effectively carried out within the limited confines of a single room. Another common characteristic of these activities is that they rarely require a high degree of verbalization. Instead, they often involve staccato-like verbal activity (such as "Bang, you're dead," "Hit the ball," and "Run") which is of limited use as they engage in interaction with others outside the immediate situation. There does exist a qualitative differential regarding the quality of language expressed by boys from the two classes which can only be accounted for by consideration of a wide range of influential factors. As was also true for the girls, the quality of the language patterns utilized by the parents (and particularly the mothers) differs with social class membership. Among the middle-class families it is a common practice for the parents to spend a considerable amount of time speaking and reading to the children, a practice which is not so common in those families characterized by lower social class membership. Thus, those children from the lower socio-economic class do not listen to or utilize formal language to the extent required of children with middle-class parents.

The boys from both socio-economic classes tend not to have a male model in their homes all day to observe and emulate. Among the boys from the lower socio-economic class this problem is exaggerated by the fact that there is a higher incidence of female-headed homes which deprives these children of contact with a consistent male model (or one with a desirable behavioral and attitudinal pattern) for even a short time every day. Thus the boys have

considerably fewer opportunities than the girls to observe and internalize the behavioral and attitudinal patterns of those whom they must emulate in later years. Even when the male heads of the families are available the boys have little chance to observe them at work and to understand the nature of the activities in which they engage daily.

In direct contrast to what existed for the girls, the mass media (particularly television and the movies) tend to bombard the boys with a preponderance of models which depict males as either bungling fools easily manipulated by and subservient to their female mates or as daring he-men who go through life destroying or killing all who interfere with their plans. Neither of these models can be said to be worthy of emulation.

Conclusions

When seen from both a historical and a contemporary point of view it is clearly obvious that the public schools in our country were designed as instruments of the middle class; as a means of meeting their needs and at the same time facilitating the development of a more highly trained working class in an evolving society. This middle-class orientation is observable in terms of both the purposes of the institution and the personnel employed to maintain it.

An examination of those experiences and situations common to boys and girls from the middle and lower socio-economic classes also leads to the inescapable conclusion that the schools are best suited for educating only certain segments of the total student population. The facts leading to this conclusion are as follows:

1. girls are better prepared throughout their childhood for the type of clothing that must be worn in school; particularly with regard to its maintenance;

2. the admonishments to which girls are subject ("be careful," "be neat," "act like a young lady") are more in line with those of the school than those to which the boys are subjected;

3. the behavioral patterns which females in our society are expected to manifest are more similar to those required by the school than are those of the boys (Thus, the girls are used to passive activities, confinement to smaller spatial areas for long periods of time, more extensive verbalization, neatness, and following instructions.);

4. disadvantaged students are handicapped in school as a result of their limited training in the use of formal English. This handicap is particularly evident for disadvantaged boys. Since they do not receive sufficient training in the formal use of English either through their play activities or within their families, they are largely unprepared to meet the demands of the school;

5. since the middle-class boy has received sufficient training in the use of formal English to permit him some degree of success (whether he likes school or not), it is usually unneccessary for him to resort to aggressive behavior in order to attain recognition;

6. the boy from the lower socio-economic class, disliking school and severely limited in terms of opportunities for success, often finds aggressive behavior his only means of obtaining recognition in school;

7. within the school largely populated with disadvantaged youth the girls, as a result of their previous training and experience, manifest behavioral and attitudinal patterns which permit them a greater degree of success and recognition than is available to the boys;

8. the discriminatory behavior and attitudes of middle-class oriented teachers consistently operates to the disadvantage of lower-class students.

In summary, it is evident that students from homes in which the parents are representative of the lower socio-economic class are at a disadvantage in the schools, and this poses especially severe problems for disadvantaged boys.

It is of particular importance to note that, as currently operated, the schools are essentially institutions for girls; the activities in which the students must engage and the expectations by which their behavior is regulated are familiar to the girls as a result of their prior experiences but are largely unfamiliar to the boys as they enter school.

As a result, it can be anticipated that the disciplinary problems which boys currently create within the schools will continue to increase in number and severity, and that the problem will be most severe in those schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged boys.

It is suggested here, as it has been many times, that the schools must initiate instructional and operational patterns designed to promote the maximum development of every individual. Related to this is the fact that teachers must receive a more thorough training; one which will better prepare them for the role of determining which teaching-learning conditions are best for each student and, also, to provide those situations.

It may be necessary for the schools to reexamine their instructional program in terms of the problems posed by the differential expectation and behavior patterns which boys and girls bring to school. Perhaps, for some subjects, it would be preferable for the schools to provide instruction for boys and girls in separate classes. There is also a strong possibility that, in some cases, boys might spend an entire year in school without having girls mixed into their classes.

As pointed out earlier it is the disadvantaged students, and particularly the boys, who bear the brunt of the inequities built into the present system. Therefore, it is in schools with a significant percentage of disadvantaged boys that this modification of operational and instructional patterns should be initiated first.

We, as educators, have always recognized our responsibility to provide special programs for "exceptional" children. To that end, specialized programs have been provided for gifted and retarded children, for those who could not hear and for those without sight, and for those with psychological problems as well as for those with physical disabilities. We must now take another step toward professional maturity and recognize that the disadvantaged student is also an "exceptional" child and requires the services of a highly trained teacher to carry out a specially designed educational program.

Some day, when teachers attain a considerably greater degree of professional maturity than is currently the case, it will be apparent that every child is "exceptional" and requires a specialized program designed to meet his particular needs. Until that time we must be content with a slow but, hopefully, steady rate of progress.

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